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ABSTRACT

Under provisions of the Higher Education Amendments of 1998, the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) studied participation in college athletics, including decisions by colleges and universities to add or discontinue sports teams. Information was gathered from participation statistics of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and the National Collegiate Athletic Association and from questionnaires completed by 1,192 (96%) of the athletic directors of schools participating in either of these associations. Information was also collected on how institutions paid for new teams, and site visits to four schools provided some insights into how schools augmented their athletic programs without eliminating teams or severely reducing funding. Findings show that the number of women participating in intercollegiate athletics at four-year colleges and universities increased substantially, from 90,000 to 163,000 between school years 1981-1982 and 1998-1999, while the number of men grew more modestly, from 220,000 to 232,000, paralleling the actual increase in college enrollment. The total number of women's teams increased by 3,784, while men's teams increased by only a net of 36. For both men and women, soccer was the sport with the largest net increase in teams. The largest net decrease for women occurred in gymnastics; for men, the largest decrease was in the number of wrestling teams. In all, 963 institutions added teams and 307 discontinued teams since 1992-1993. When women's teams were added, the factors most often cited were the need to address student interest and the need to meet gender goals or equity requirements. Schools that were able to add teams without discontinuing others used a variety of strategies to increase athletic program revenue and reduce costs. Two appendixes discuss study scope and methodology and list GAO contacts and acknowledgments. (Contains 4 figures and 10 tables.) (SLD)

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United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Report to Congressional Requesters

March 2001

INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

Four-Year Colleges' Experiences Adding and Discontinuing Teams

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Abbreviations

NAIA	National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association

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United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

March 8, 2001

The Honorable James Jeffords
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate

The Honorable Edward Kennedy
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate

The Honorable John Boehner
Chairman
Committee on Education and the Workforce
House of Representatives

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Democratic Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce
House of Representatives

About 400,000 American undergraduate college and university students participate in intercollegiate athletics each year. During the last 2 decades, the number of college athletes and the sports in which they participate have changed markedly. Colleges and universities across the country have added many sports teams and discontinued others. In response to these changes, the Congress included provisions in the Higher Education Amendments of 1998 that require GAO to study participation in athletics, including schools' decisions to add or discontinue sports teams. While the mandate also required information on high school and 2-year college athletics, because of limited readily available information and the difficulty of collecting comparable information from these schools, as agreed with your offices, we focused only on 4-year intercollegiate athletics. This report answers the following questions:

- How did the number of men's and women's intercollegiate sports participants and teams at 4-year colleges and universities change in the 2 decades since the1981–82 school year?
- How many colleges and universities added and discontinued teams since the 1992–93 school year, and what influenced their most recent decisions to add and discontinue teams?

- How did colleges and universities make and implement decisions to discontinue intercollegiate sports teams?
- When colleges and universities added teams, what types of strategies did they use to avoid discontinuing sports teams or severely reducing their funding?

To determine changes in the numbers of participants and teams at 4-year colleges and universities, we obtained statistics from the two largest national intercollegiate sports associations for 4-year colleges and universities—the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). Information for these schools covered 18 years—school years 1981–82 through 1998–99. Although these data are unverified, they are widely used by researchers to study this topic. To gather information to respond to the other questions, we sent a questionnaire covering the 1992–93 to 1999–2000 school years to athletic directors at all 1,310 4-year schools that belong to one of these two associations. We received responses from 91 percent of these schools. For detailed information on schools' experiences in attempting to add sports teams without substantially reducing opportunities for other athletes, we also visited four colleges and universities. For details about our scope and methodology, see appendix I. Our work was done between February and December 2000 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Results in Brief

The number of women participating in intercollegiate athletics at 4-year colleges and universities increased substantially—from 90,000 to 163,000—between school years 1981–82 and 1998–99, while the number of men participating increased more modestly—from 220,000 to 232,000. Women's athletic participation grew at more than twice the rate of their growth in undergraduate enrollment, while men's participation more closely matched their growth in undergraduate enrollment. The total number of women's teams increased from 5,695 to 9,479, a gain of 3,784 teams, compared to an increase from 9,113 to 9,149 teams for men, a gain of 36 teams. By 1998–99, women had 330 more teams than men. For both men and women, soccer had the largest net gain in the number of teams. Not all sports saw net gains. Several women's sports and more than a dozen men's sports experienced net decreases in the number of teams. For women, the largest net decreases in number of teams occurred in gymnastics; for men, the largest decreases were in wrestling.

In all, 963 schools added teams and 307 discontinued teams since 1992–93. Most were able to add teams—usually women's teams—without discontinuing any teams. Among the colleges and universities that added a women's team, the two factors cited most often as greatly influencing the decision were the need to address student interest in particular sports and the need to meet gender equity goals or requirements. Similarly, schools that discontinued a men's team cited a lack of student interest in the sport and gender equity concerns as the factors greatly influencing their decision, as well as the need to reallocate the athletic budget to other sports. The relative importance of these factors varied by size of the athletic program. For example, in schools with large intercollegiate sports programs, meeting gender equity goals and requirements was the factor most often cited as influencing decisions to discontinue men's teams, while in schools with small programs, lack of student interest was cited most often.

Colleges and universities that discontinued a team typically took 3 months or less between originating the proposal and making the final decision. Most schools informed the members of the campus community of the possibility that the team would be discontinued, and most held meetings with campus groups before making the final decision. Schools with large athletic programs were more likely to include groups such as alumni. Most schools offered to help affected athletes transfer to other schools, and students receiving athletics-related financial aid—particularly students at larger schools—continued to receive financial aid for at least some period after the team was disbanded.

Schools that were able to add one or more teams without discontinuing others used a variety of strategies to increase athletic program revenue and contain costs. Schools with smaller athletic programs typically relied on additional support from the institution's general fund, while those with larger programs more often used revenue from other sources, such as donations from private sources and athletic facility rental fees. Schools we visited also sought to contain costs by, for example, hiring a coach who assumed teaching responsibilities to replace a full-time faculty member.

We provided the Department of Education a draft of this report for comment, and it did not provide comments.

Background

Although intercollegiate sports may bring to mind nationally televised football and basketball games, 4-year schools' intercollegiate sports

programs vary widely, from small programs involving fewer than 10 teams with expenditures of less than $1 million to large programs with more than 900 student-athletes and expenditures in excess of $50 million. At many schools, intercollegiate athletic competition serves primarily to meet the needs of student-athletes—to give them opportunities to develop their athletic ability as they pursue their courses of study. Schools also view intercollegiate athletics as a means of recruiting prospective students. At schools with large athletic programs, sports serve as an important focal point for students, faculty and staff, alumni, surrounding communities, and the national television audience.

Typically, schools with the largest number of athletic programs and facilities belong to Division I-A of the NCAA, and those with smaller programs are members of NCAA Divisions II or III or the second major national collegiate association, NAIA. Most 4-year postsecondary institutions with intercollegiate athletic programs participate in one of these two associations. NCAA, the larger, administers intercollegiate athletics for over 1,000 4-year (baccalaureate degree-granting) schools. Division I member schools are further divided into three categories—I-A, I-AA, and I-AAA—with those that have larger football programs generally placed in I-A and those without football programs in I-AAA. Division I-AA schools sponsor football but are not subject to the spectator attendance requirements that apply to Division I-A schools. In April 2000, NAIA consisted of 330 member institutions. The NAIA does not have divisions except for basketball and football, which each have Divisions I and II.

Although no federal monies fund intercollegiate sports programs, federal involvement has arisen in part as a result of civil rights legislation. For example, at schools receiving federal financial assistance, all education programs and activities—including intercollegiate athletic programs—are subject to title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.[1] Federal regulations implementing title IX require that men and women be provided equitable opportunities to participate in intercollegiate athletics, and equitable scholarships, facilities, equipment, supplies, and other benefits.[2] The Department of Education's

[1]20 U.S.C. 1681-1688.

[2]For details, see 34 CFR 106.41; Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, *Clarification of Intercollegiate Athletics Policy Guidance: The Three-Part Test* (Jan. 16, 1996); and Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Dear Colleague letter from Norma Cantu regarding athletic scholarships (Jul. 23, 1998).

Office for Civil Rights assesses schools' compliance with these requirements. To comply with requirements concerning equitable opportunities to participate in intercollegiate sports, schools must meet any one of the three following criteria, which Education refers to as parts of a three-part test: (1) intercollegiate-level participation opportunities for male and female students are provided in numbers substantially proportionate to their respective enrollments, or (2) the institution can show a history and continuing practice of program expansion that is demonstrably responsive to the developing interests and abilities of the members of the underrepresented gender, or (3) it can be demonstrated that the interests and abilities of the members of the underrepresented gender have been fully and effectively accommodated by the present program.[3]

Women Made Substantial Gains in Intercollegiate Sports Participation

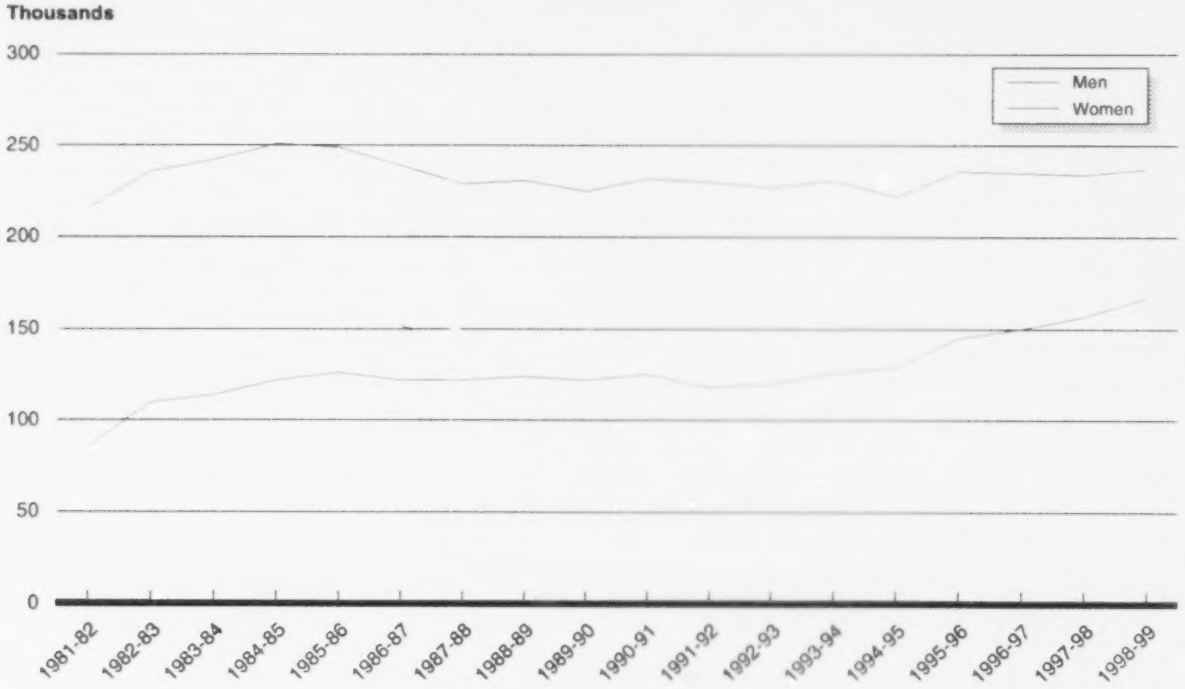
Since the early 1980s, the number of women participating in intercollegiate sports has increased substantially. Although male athletes still outnumber their female counterparts, the growth in their programs has been much smaller and the number of women's teams now exceeds the number of men's teams. The percentage of male undergraduates who participate in intercollegiate athletics is essentially the same as it was in 1981–82, while the percentage of women has increased considerably.

Gap Between Female and Male Participants Has Narrowed

The rapid growth in women's participation in intercollegiate sports since 1981–82 has narrowed the gap between genders (see fig. 1). The number of women in intercollegiate sports increased by 81 percent (from 90,000 to 163,000 participants) and the number of men increased by 5 percent (from 220,000 to 232,000 participants) between 1981–82 and 1998–99. The growth in women's participation was fastest during the early 1980s and in the 1990s. Men's participation also grew in the early 1980s, but peaked in 1985–86. Since then, it decreased modestly, then fluctuated within a narrow range.

[3]The term "participation opportunities" in part one of the three-part test refers to the number of athletes on each team, not numbers of teams. For more information concerning the three-part test and Office for Civil Rights enforcement of title IX, see *Gender Equity: Men's and Women's Participation in Higher Education* (GAO-01-128, Dec. 15, 2000).

Figure 1: Estimated Numbers of Participants in Intercollegiate Athletics at 4-Year Colleges and Universities, School Years 1981–82 Through 1998–99



Note: Intercollegiate athletic participants represent the sum of the number of athletes on each team at each school. The number of participants is overstated to the extent that some athletes participate on more than one team and some schools are members of both NAIA and NCAA.

Source: GAO analysis of NCAA and NAIA participation statistics.

The growth in the number of women athletes may reflect, in part, the rapid increase in women's undergraduate enrollment. From 1981–82 to 1998–99 women's undergraduate enrollment grew by 30 percent, compared to 6 percent for men. However, women's participation also grew as an overall percentage of women undergraduates. Women athletes made up 3.9 percent of women undergraduates in 1981–82 and 5.5 percent in 1998–99. In

contrast, the portion of undergraduate men participating in athletics remained relatively steady, starting and ending the period at 9.3 percent.[4]

The trends in the number of women participants varied by sport. For example, table 1 shows that the biggest increase in the number of women participants—about 18,000—was in soccer. Though participation increased in most sports, five sports reported decreases in participation. The biggest decline occurred in gymnastics, with nearly 700 fewer women gymnasts in 1998–99 than in 1981–82.

Table 1: Change in Number of Women Participants for NAIA and NCAA Schools

Sport	1981–82	1998–99	Change in number of participants	Percentage change
Soccer	1,855	19,987	18,132	977%
Indoor track	6,026	15,927	9,901	164
Outdoor track	11,933	19,611	7,678	64
Cross-country	5,560	13,048	7,488	135
Softball	10,816	17,320	6,504	60
Rowing	1,187	5,628	4,441	374
Basketball	12,699	17,118	4,419	35
Volleyball	11,762	15,603	3,841	33
Swimming	6,570	10,086	3,516	54
Golf	1,060	3,140	2,080	196
Lacrosse	2,648	4,749	2,101	79
Tennis	7,849	9,319	1,470	19
Water polo	19	746	727	3,826
Ice hockey	336	900	564	168
Equestrian	101	633	532	527
Skiing	359	535	176	49
Squash	238	365	127	53
Rifle	90	184	94	104
Synchronized swimming	49	108	59	120

[4]These participation rates were calculated using full-time undergraduate enrollment figures for fall 1998 at all 4-year colleges and universities whether or not they were members of NCAA or NAIA.

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Sport	1981–82	1998–99	Change in number of participants	Percentage change
Archery	75	106	31	41
Badminton	141	94	-47	-33
Bowling	88	20	-68	-77
Fencing	765	594	-171	-22
Field hockey	5,701	5,472	-229	-4
Gymnastics	2,173	1,490	-683	-31
Total	**90,100**	**162,783**	**72,683**	**81%**

Note: Athletes who participate in more than one intercollegiate sport are counted as participants in each sport. Information for schools that were members of both NAIA and NCAA was counted only once to avoid overstating the number of participants at these schools. This table excludes sports that were neither championship nor emerging NCAA sports in 1998–99. In 1981–82, this represented 222 participants in six sports—cricket, judo, pistol, polo, rugby, and sailing.

Source: GAO analysis of NCAA and NAIA participation statistics.

In men's sports, increases and decreases were more evenly balanced, with increases in the number of participants in 14 sports and decreases in 12. As shown in table 2, the greatest increase in numbers of participants occurred in football, with about 7,200 more players. Football also had the greatest number of participants—approximately 60,000, or about twice as many as the next largest sport. Wrestling experienced the largest decrease in participation—a drop of more than 2,600 participants.

Table 2: Change in Number of Men Participants for NAIA and NCAA Schools

Sport	1981–82	1998–99	Change in number of participants	Percentage change
Football	53,213	60,412	7,199	14%
Baseball	24,329	29,781	5,452	22
Indoor track	15,568	17,605	2,037	13
Lacrosse	4,193	6,193	2,000	48
Soccer	19,647	21,579	1,932	10
Basketball	17,368	18,920	1,552	9
Rowing	2,053	2,444	391	19
Equestrian	20	371	351	1,755
Volleyball	878	1,124	246	28
Sailing	243	288	45	19

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Sport	1981–82	1998–99	Change in number of participants	Percentage change
Bowling	103	142	39	38
Golf	8,935	8,977	42	Less than 1
Archery	60	63	3	5
Squash	346	347	1	Less than 1
Badminton	38	26	-12	-32
Water polo	1,002	907	-95	-9
Ice hockey	3,831	3,702	-129	-3
Cross-country	12,158	12,007	-151	-1
Skiing	856	574	-282	-33
Rifle	779	343	-436	-56
Fencing	1,419	646	-773	-54
Swimming	8,582	7,639	-943	-11
Gymnastics	1,397	375	-1,022	-73
Tennis	9,960	8,555	-1,405	-14
Outdoor track	23,986	22,280	-1,706	-7
Wrestling	9,214	6,566	-2,648	-29
Total	**220,178**	**231,866**	**11,688**	**5%**

Note: Athletes who participate in more than one intercollegiate sport are counted as participants in each sport. Information for schools that were members of both NAIA and NCAA was counted only once to avoid overstating the number of participants at these schools. This table excludes sports that were neither championship nor emerging NCAA sports in 1998–99. In 1981–82, this represented 836 participants in 11 sports—boxing, cricket, 150-pound football, judo, pistol, polo, rugby, softball, trap/skeet, ultimate Frisbee™, and weightlifting.

Source: GAO analysis of NCAA and NAIA participation statistics.

Women's Teams Outnumber Men's Teams

Though the number of male participants was greater than the number of female participants in 1998–99, there were 330 more women's teams than men's teams. The average women's team had fewer athletes than the average men's team. From 1981–82 to 1998–99, the number of women's intercollegiate sports teams increased by 66 percent (from 5,695 to 9,479 teams). Most sports saw an increase in the number of teams, with the largest increase occurring in women's soccer, where the number of teams rose from 80 to 926. The greatest decrease occurred in gymnastics, where the number of teams fell from 190 to 90 (see table 3).

Table 3: Change in Number of Women's Teams for NAIA and NCAA Schools

Sport	1981–82	1998–99	Change in number of teams	Percentage change
Soccer	80	926	846	1,058%
Cross-country	496	1,012	516	104
Softball	555	987	432	78
Volleyball	812	1,162	350	43
Indoor track	288	592	304	106
Basketball	910	1,212	302	33
Golf	125	402	277	222
Tennis	735	983	248	34
Outdoor track	524	767	243	46
Lacrosse	105	213	108	103
Swimming	364	465	101	28
Rowing	43	122	79	184
Water polo	1	37	36	3,600
Equestrian	7	41	34	486
Rifle	16	44	28	175
Ice hockey	17	40	23	135
Skiing	33	44	11	33
Squash	16	27	11	69
Synchronized swimming	3	7	4	133
Badminton	11	10	-1	-9
Archery	9	6	-3	-33
Bowling	11	5	-6	-55
Field hockey	268	240	-28	-10
Fencing	76	45	-31	-41
Gymnastics	190	90	-100	-53
Total	**5,695**	**9,479**	**3,784**	**66%**

Note: Information about participants at schools that were members of both NAIA and NCAA was counted only once to avoid overstating the number of teams sponsored by these schools. This table excludes sports that were neither championship nor emerging NCAA sports in 1998–99. In 1981–82, this represented 18 teams in six sports—cricket, judo, pistol, polo, rugby, and sailing.

Source: GAO analysis of NCAA and NAIA participation statistics.

Half of men's sports saw a decline in the number of teams. Two sports had no change and the remaining sports (nearly half) had an increase in the number of teams. As with women's sports, the largest increase came in

soccer (135 new teams). Football, the sport that saw the largest increase in the number of participants, saw a decrease of 37 teams, mainly from NAIA schools. Gymnastics, fencing, and rifle saw the largest percentage decline in the number of teams. The largest decrease in the number of teams was in wrestling (171 teams) (see table 4).

Table 4: Change in Number of Men's Teams for NAIA and NCAA Schools

Sport	1981–82	1998–99	Change in number of teams	Percentage change
Soccer	744	879	135	18%
Baseball	926	1,011	85	9
Basketball	1,127	1,209	82	7
Golf	805	867	62	8
Lacrosse	138	197	59	43
Cross-country	916	947	31	3
Equestrian	2	33	31	1,550
Indoor track	533	558	25	5
Rowing	48	70	22	46
Volleyball	63	79	16	25
Sailing	15	22	7	47
Squash	21	21	0	0
Badminton	4	4	0	0
Archery	7	6	-1	-14
Bowling	13	10	-3	-23
Water polo	49	43	-6	-12
Ice hockey	141	131	-10	-7
Skiing	55	40	-15	-27
Swimming	415	390	-25	-6
Outdoor track	762	735	-27	-4
Football[a]	705	668	-37	-5
Fencing	79	37	-42	-53
Rifle	83	41	-42	-51
Gymnastics	82	26	-56	-68
Tennis	952	868	-84	-9
Wrestling	428	257	-171	-40
Total	**9,113**	**9,149**	**36**	**0.4%**

Note: Information for schools that were members of both NAIA and NCAA was counted only once to avoid overstating the number of teams sponsored by these schools. This table excludes sports that were neither championship nor emerging NCAA sports in 1998–99. In 1981–82, this represented 30 teams in 11 sports—boxing, cricket, 150-pound football, judo, pistol, polo, rugby, softball, trap/skeet, ultimate Frisbee™, and weightlifting.

[a]Excludes 150-pound football.

Source: GAO analysis of NCAA and NAIA participation statistics.

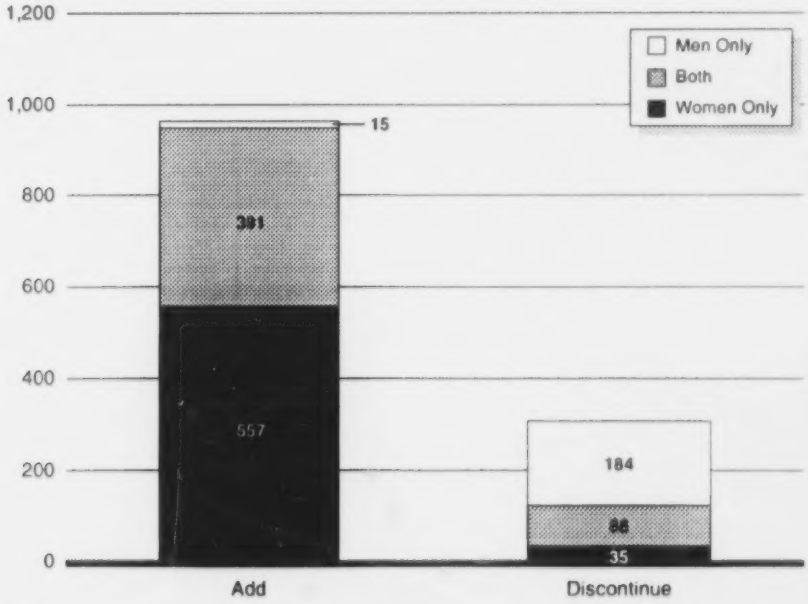
Experiences Adding and Discontinuing Teams Varied Among Schools With Different-Sized Athletic Programs

About 80 percent of schools added one or more women's sports teams during the 1992–93 to 1999–2000 period, and more than two-thirds did so without discontinuing any teams. Student interest in a particular sport was often cited as an influence behind many of these decisions. Gender equity considerations also often influenced decisions to add women's teams and discontinue men's teams, particularly at schools with large athletic programs. The financial impact of adding or discontinuing teams varied widely by size of program and by sport.

Most Schools Added Women's Teams Without Discontinuing Teams

Overall, among the 1,191 college and universities responding to the questionnaire, 963 added at least one team and 307 discontinued at least one (see fig. 2). However, of the 948 schools that added one or more women's teams, 72 percent did so without discontinuing any teams. Only about 16 percent of all respondents neither added nor discontinued a team from 1992–93 through 1999–2000. In total, schools added nearly three times as many women's teams as men's teams during this period—1,919 teams for women, compared with 702 for men. They discontinued more than twice as many men's teams—386 teams for men, 150 for women.

Figure 2: Number of Schools Adding and Discontinuing Men's and Women's Intercollegiate Sports Teams, School Years 1992–93 to 1999–2000



Note: Some schools both added and discontinued teams. Those schools are represented in both columns.

Source: GAO survey of collegiate athletic directors.

Schools with smaller programs were more likely to add men's teams. Only about 3 percent of the schools with the largest intercollegiate athletic programs (NCAA Division I-A) added one or more men's teams, compared with 39 percent for NCAA Division III schools and 54 percent of NAIA schools (see table 5).

Table 5: Percentage of 4-Year Schools Adding and Discontinuing Intercollegiate Sports Teams, School Years 1992–93 to 1999–2000

	NCAA division						
Activity	I-A	I-AA	I-AAA	II	III	NAIA	All respondents
Add men's team	3%	17%	29%	32%	39%	54%	34%
Add women's team	88	93	81	72	79	80	80
Discontinue men's team	32	25	35	27	18	19	23
Discontinue women's team	6	6	5	13	9	15	10

Note: A total of 1,191 schools responded to the questionnaire, including 110 in NCAA Division I-A, 109 in I-AA, 79 in I-AAA, 275 in II, 388 in III, and 281 in NAIA. The table includes data from 51 respondents whose schools were members of both NCAA and NAIA. Their responses are reflected both in the NAIA and applicable NCAA columns.

Source: GAO survey of collegiate athletic directors.

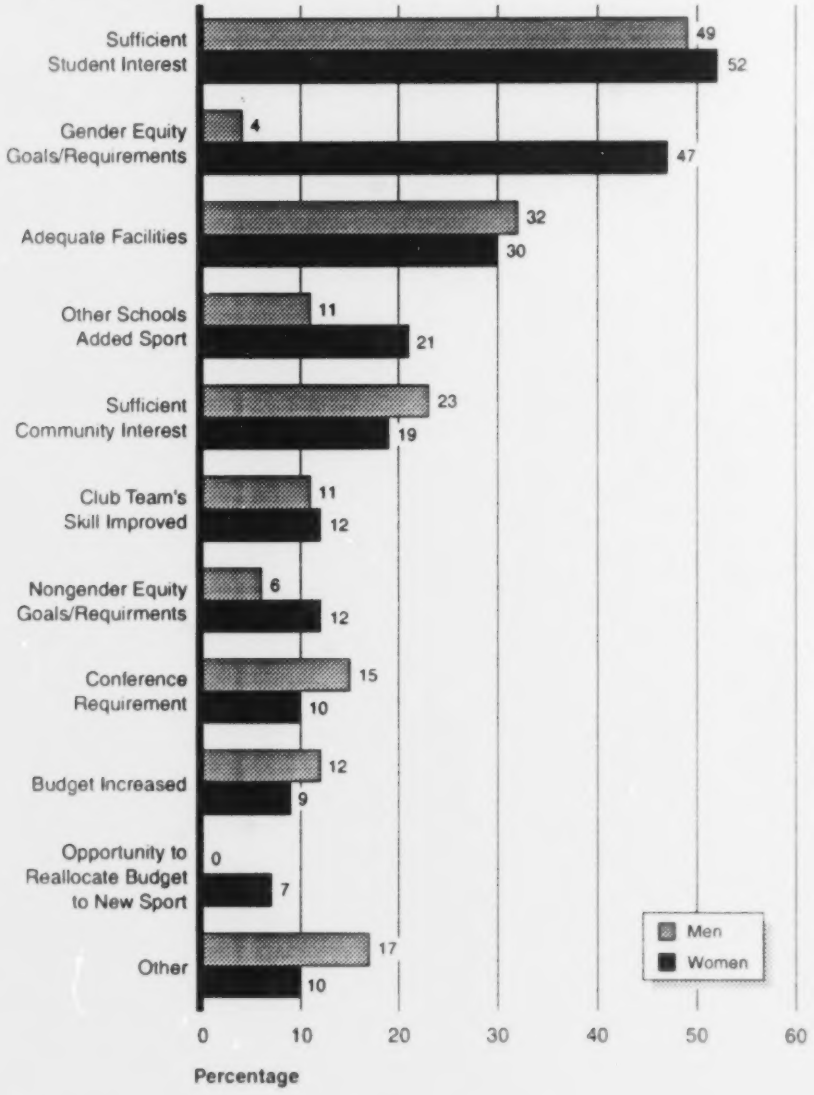
Addition of Teams Often Influenced by Student Interest, Among Other Factors

The level of student interest was the factor schools cited most often as greatly or very greatly influencing their most recent decision to add both men's and women's teams (see fig. 3).[5] Overall, 52 percent of the respondents that had added a women's sports team indicated that student interest was a great or very great influence in the decision, and nearly as many schools (47 percent) cited the need to meet gender equity goals or requirements. Other factors cited less frequently when adding a women's team included the availability of adequate facilities and sufficient equipment, the growth in the number of teams to compete against, community interest, and enough improvement in a club team's skill to compete at the varsity intercollegiate level.[6]

[5]Schools nearly always cited multiple factors as affecting their decision. Less than 5 percent cited only one factor; two-thirds of respondents cited four or more.

[6]Club teams may compete with teams from other schools, but are not designated as varsity intercollegiate teams by the college or athletic association.

Figure 3: Factors Reported by Schools That Greatly or Very Greatly Affected the Decision to Add Teams



Source: GAO survey of collegiate athletic directors

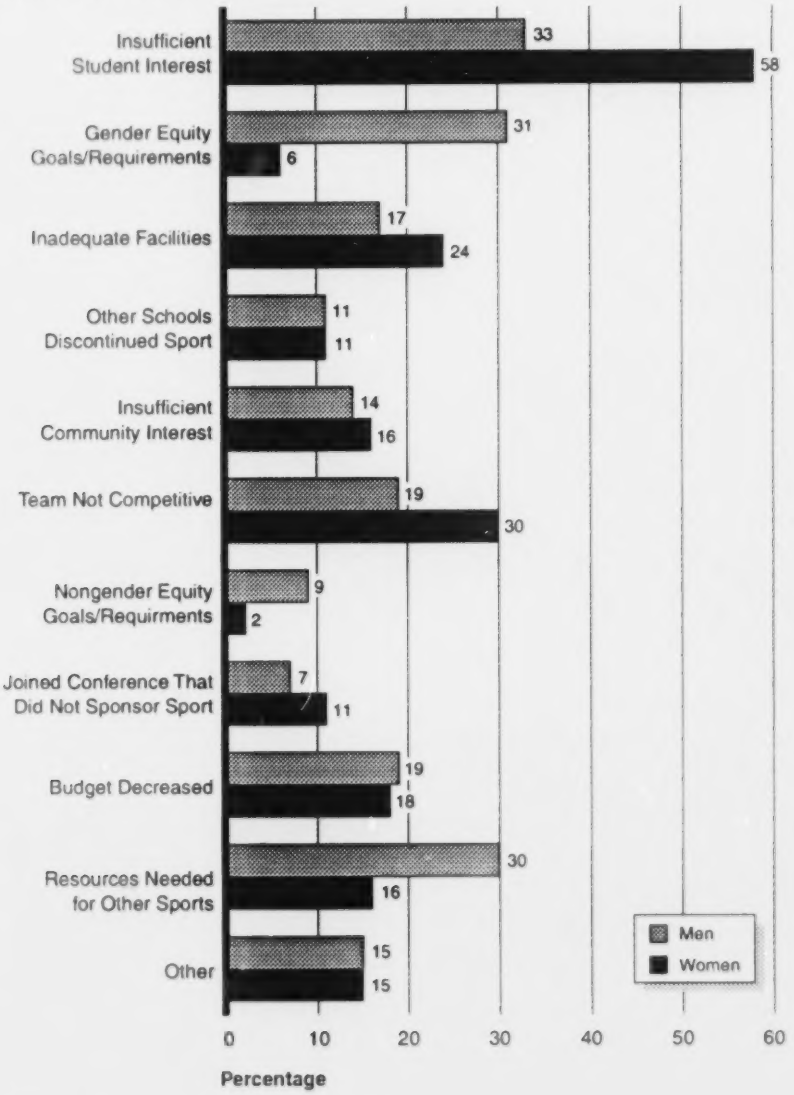
The factors that most influenced recent decisions to add women's teams varied by the size of a school's intercollegiate athletic programs. For example, respondents from NCAA Division I-A schools compared to Division III schools more often cited gender equity considerations (82 percent versus 35 percent) and community interest (35 percent versus 12 percent) as a great or very great influence. Division III schools cited the availability of adequate facilities and sufficient equipment (30 percent, compared with 24 percent in Division I-A.) Both types of schools cited student interest about as often (60 percent versus 55 percent).

For men's sports, the pattern of which factors most influenced schools' decisions to add a team was somewhat different, particularly with regard to gender equity goals or requirements. As was the case for the addition of women's teams, student interest was the factor cited most often (49 percent) as influencing the addition of men's teams. After student interest, the factor cited most often was the availability of sufficient facilities and adequate equipment (32 percent), followed by community interest (23 percent). Gender equity considerations, an influential factor for adding a women's team, was cited by only 4 percent of schools that had added a men's team.

Student Interest Also Among Factors That Influenced Decisions to Discontinue Teams

The level of student interest was the most often cited factor in schools' most recent decisions to discontinue men's and women's teams (see fig. 4). Among the 272 responding schools that discontinued a men's team, 91 (33 percent) cited lack of student interest as a great or very great influence, 83 (31 percent) cited the need to meet gender equity goals or requirements, and 82 (30 percent) cited the need to reallocate budget resources to other sports.

Figure 4: Factors Reported by Schools That Greatly or Very Greatly Affected the Decision to Discontinue Teams



Source: GAO survey of collegiate athletic directors.

Factors affecting decisions to discontinue men's teams varied with the size of a school's program. Among schools with large intercollegiate athletic programs, gender equity considerations more often figured as a great or very great influence. At NCAA Division I-A schools, for example, a majority (54 percent) of the respondents discontinuing a men's team cited gender equity considerations as a great or very great influence. Insufficient student interest in the sport was not often cited; only 6 percent of respondents cited it as a great or very great influence. In contrast, among NCAA Division III respondents, the absence of sufficient student interest in the sport was the most often-cited factor (44 percent cited it as a great or very great influence). The need to reallocate resources to other sports was the next most often-cited factor (cited by 26 percent), followed by decreases in the budget and gender equity considerations (each cited by 21 percent).[7]

Decisions to discontinue a women's team were generally most often driven by the level of student interest. Of the 123 schools that discontinued one or more women's teams, 58 percent cited the lack of student interest as a great or very great influence. The next most often-cited influences were the team's inability to compete at the desired level and the absence of adequate facilities and sufficient equipment.

Adding and Discontinuing Teams Had Widely Varied Impact on Athletic Program Expenditures

The most recent addition of an intercollegiate team increased the average school's total intercollegiate expenditures by an estimated 6 percent, and the most recent discontinuation of a team reduced expenditures by 4 percent.[8] In general, schools with larger intercollegiate programs experienced smaller percentage changes in their expenditures, as shown in table 6. For example, adding a women's team at the NCAA Division I-A level increased costs an average of 3 percent, compared to 5 percent for NCAA Division III and 9 percent for NAIA. The comparable averages for recent additions of men's teams were 2, 8, and 13 percent.

[7]The proportion of schools citing gender equity goals and requirements as greatly or very greatly influencing the decision was 82, 81, 52, 49, 33, and 27 percent respectively for NCAA Division I-A, I-AA, I-AAA, II, III, and NAIA members that were not also members of NCAA.

[8]The median values for schools' estimates were a 3-percent increase in expenditures by adding teams and a 1-percent decrease by discontinuing teams.

Table 6: Per-School Average Estimated Percentage Change in Total Intercollegiate Athletic Expenditures From the Most Recent Addition or Discontinuation of a Team

	Percentage increase (decrease) in expenditures				
	Most recent team added		Most recent team discontinued		
College's affiliation	Men	Women	Men	Women	Average expenditures (in thousands)[a]
NCAA					
Division I-A	2[b]	3	(1)	(1)[b]	$14,266
Division I-AA	6	3	(1)	(0)[b]	4,371
Division I-AAA	2	5	(4)	(0)[b]	3,013
Division II	7	4	(3)	(5)	1,192
Division III	8	5	(3)	(3)	529
NAIA	13	9	(7)	(6)	460
Total (all schools)	**8**	**5**	**(4)**	**(4)**	**$2,712**

[a]These are the average of schools' total intercollegiate expenditures in the prior year. In some cases respondents indicated that their estimates applied to some expenditures but not to others. For example, some respondents provided figures for operating expenditures only. Figures do not include capital expenditures or debt service. In about 15 percent of cases respondents did not provide an estimate. In some cases schools begin incurring expenses, such as coaches' salaries, for the new sport during the year proceeding the first year of intercollegiate competition.

[b]The calculation is based on estimates from fewer than 10 respondents.

Source: GAO survey of collegiate athletic directors.

The effect of adding or discontinuing a team also varied by sport (see table 7). For example, schools estimated that adding women's soccer typically increased expenditures by 6 percent, while adding football teams increased expenditures by an average of 31 percent. Discontinuing men's tennis decreased expenditures by an average of 2 percent, while discontinuing football decreased expenditures an average of 24 percent.

Table 7: Average Estimated Percentage Change in Total Intercollegiate Athletic Expenditures From Recent Additions or Discontinuations of Selected Teams

Action taken	Average of percentage increase (decrease) in expenditures[a]	Number of respondents
Added women's soccer	6	228
Added women's golf	2	116
Added women's softball	7	101
Added women's lacrosse	6	45
Added men's golf	3	50
Added football	31	14
Discontinued men's tennis	(2)	39
Discontinued men's wrestling	(2)	38
Discontinued women's tennis	(7)	25
Discontinued men's golf	(2)	22
Discontinued men's outdoor track	(2)	21
Discontinued football	(24)	11

[a]These are the average of schools' estimated percentage increase or decrease in total intercollegiate expenditures.

Source: GAO survey of collegiate athletic directors.

Schools Typically Discontinued Teams Quickly and Assisted Athletes in the Transition

The 307 responding schools that discontinued a team during the 1992–93 to 1999–2000 period typically spent 3 months or less between making the proposal to discontinue a team and making a final decision. Most schools informed the campus community of the proposed discontinuation before the decision was final. Once the decision was made to discontinue a team, however, most did not provide a written explanation for their decision. Most schools held meetings to discuss the proposal with groups in the campus community. Schools with larger athletic programs more often included other interested parties, such as alumni or members of booster clubs. Affected athletes usually continued to receive athletic financial aid after the sport was discontinued.

Time Spent Making the Decision Was Generally Less Than 3 Months

Most decisions to discontinue a team were considered and implemented within a few months following the initial proposal, according to the responses from the colleges and universities concerning the team they

most recently discontinued during the 1992–93 to 1999–2000 period.[9] The median of the reported amount of time between making such a proposal to reaching a final decision was 2 months. In 38 percent of cases, both the proposal and the final decision came in the same month. In about 5 percent of cases, the schools took more than a year to reach a final decision.[10]

The amount of time before the team stopped participating was also brief. For about one-third of the schools, the team had already stopped participating before the final decision to discontinue the sport was made. For another 26 percent, participation stopped during the month the final decision was made. For another 17 percent of the respondents, participation ended by the third month following the final decision. Only about 5 percent allowed sports teams to continue to play for a year or more past the time when a final decision was made.

In most cases the proposal to discontinue the team came from within the athletic department, although college administrations were a common source at schools with smaller athletic programs. About 60 percent said the proposal originated with the athletic department. At NCAA Division I-A schools, the figure was 83 percent. For NAIA and NCAA Division I-AAA schools, about one-third of the proposals originated from the school administration. For example, at NAIA schools that discontinued a sport, the athletic department initiated 46 percent of the proposals and school administration initiated 38 percent. Similarly, at NCAA Division I-AAA schools that discontinued a sport, athletic departments initiated 50 percent of the proposals and the school administration initiated another 36 percent.

Members of Campus Community Were Usually Involved Before the Final Decision Was Made

Most colleges and universities (186 of the 307 schools discontinuing a team) informed the campus community of the possibility of discontinuing the team before the decision was final. Large schools, such as those in NCAA Division I-A, were most likely to use a press release to inform the campus community of the possibility of discontinuing the sport. NCAA Division III schools more often provided the information by mail to individuals or used other means such as meetings with athletes and staff.

[9]Of the 307 cases in which a school discontinued a team, 84 discontinued both a men's and a women's team in the same month. We randomly selected either the men's or the women's team for analysis. In most cases these were men's and women's teams in the same sport.

[10]These calculations are based on usable responses from 243 of the 307 schools that discontinued a team during this period.

Most of the schools discontinuing a team (64 percent) informed affected athletes of the decision in the month it was finalized. About 20 percent of these schools indicated that they informed the affected athletes of the decision during the 3 months preceding the final decision. About 10 percent of these schools indicated that they informed the affected student athletes of a decision in the months following a final decision. Typically these schools informed the athletes within a month or two.[11]

Overall, less than half (41 percent) of schools that discontinued a sports team provided a written explanation. This varied somewhat by the size of schools' athletic programs. NCAA Division I-A and I-AA schools were least likely to provide a written explanation to affected athletes; about one-quarter of them did so. Members of NCAA Divisions II and III and NAIA were more likely to provide a written explanation; about half did so.

More than two-thirds of the schools that discontinued intercollegiate athletic teams did so without allowing an appeal of the decision. The proportion of schools allowing an appeal varied little by size of schools' athletic programs—from a low of 25 percent among Division I-AA schools to a high of 36 percent among Division I-AAA schools.[12] Several schools described their appeals process as a meeting with the athletic director. Most schools, however, described appeals as meetings with school administrators or organizational units outside the athletics department. For example, schools allowed student-athletes to appeal to the dean of students, athletic council, the school's president, or the board of trustees. One respondent described an appeal involving an open forum at which all interested parties could speak; others provided opportunities for a written appeal.

Assistance to Athletes Often Included Continued Financial Aid and Help in Transferring to Another School

About 80 percent of the schools (170 of the 212 responding schools that discontinued a team)—aside from Division III schools which are prohibited from providing athletic financial aid—indicated that they allowed their student-athletes to continue receiving aid even though the team was being discontinued. This was most often the case at NCAA Division I schools; continued aid was available at 90 percent of these schools. This was less

[11]These calculations are based on responses from 167 schools that informed the campus community of the possibility of the discontinuation of the team in advance of a final decision.

[12]These calculations are based on responses from 291 schools.

often the case at Division II schools, where 72 percent of schools indicated that student athletes could continue to receive aid. For about 86 percent of the schools that continued to provide assistance, the aid was available until the athlete graduated. At most of the rest, the aid was made available for up to 1 year. Among all NCAA and NAIA schools discontinuing a team, 86 percent assisted affected athletes in transferring to another institution's intercollegiate athletics program. However, affected athletes who remained enrolled at the school did not necessarily have the opportunity to compete in that sport at the club level. Only 41 percent gave the affected athletes that opportunity.[13]

Schools Pursued Creative Strategies to Build Athletic Programs Without Discontinuing Teams

A majority of the 1,191 school officials reported that they have been able to add one or more teams without discontinuing others. They used a variety of strategies to do so, including obtaining funding from nonschool sources and finding ways to contain costs. The four schools we reviewed in depth used strategies that ranged from fundraising to awarding fewer scholarships.

Schools Relied More on Raising Revenue Than Cutting Costs

The 693 schools that added one or more intercollegiate athletic teams over the 1992–93 to 1999–2000 period without discontinuing a team did so more often by obtaining additional revenue than by containing costs and reallocating revenue. Sources of funds tended to vary with the size of the intercollegiate athletic program. As shown in table 8, NCAA Division I-A schools tended to rely on revenue from other sports and from outside sources. Schools with smaller programs, particularly those in NCAA Division III and NAIA, most often used additional funds from the institution's general fund. In some cases, they reallocated existing resources by, for example, trimming travel expenses for all teams and using the savings to help fund the new team.

[13]These calculations are based on responses from 280 schools.

Table 8: Funding Sources Used by Schools That Added Teams Without Discontinuing Others

Percentage of schools obtaining funds through selected sources							
	NCAA division					NAIA	All
Source	I-A	I-AA	I-AAA	II	III		
General fund	37%	67%	63%	78%	83%	89%	77%
Other outside sources	62	50	46	45	14	30	33
Reducing expenses/reallocating funds	35	40	37	24	23	16	25
Revenue from other sports	71	36	27	18	2	10	18
Student activity fees	17	24	17	22	13	10	15
Endowment	14	6	2	5	4	5	5
Tuition waivers	19	4	10	2	0	2	4
State legislature	10	6	2	6	0	1	3
Other	3	11	5	5	5	7	6

Source: GAO survey responses from 693 colleges and universities that added teams without discontinuing others. This included 63 in NCAA Division I-A, 72 in I-AA, 41 in I-AAA, 130 in Division II, 243 in Division III, and 144 in NAIA.

Selected Schools Used a Range of Creative Strategies to Avoid Discontinuing Teams

For more detailed information concerning how schools added teams without discontinuing opportunities for athletes on other teams, we visited four colleges and universities to learn how they enhanced their athletic programs. We selected these four because they represented various sizes of schools and athletic programs, and different regions of the country (see table 9).[14] They used combinations of innovative strategies that, as the survey reported, placed greater emphasis on increasing athletic revenue than on cutting costs in other programs. Fundraising strategies included renting out athletic facilities, and cost-containment approaches included trimming administrative expenditures.

[14]One of the four schools had discontinued one team, an indoor track team whose members all competed on other teams—cross-country or outdoor track.

Table 9: Selected Characteristics of Schools Visited

NCAA Division	I-A	I-A	I-AAA	III
Location	**Midwest**	**Southeast**	**Mid-Atlantic**	**Pacific Northwest**
Type of school	**Public**	**Public**	**Public**	**Private**
Number of teams added from school year 1992–93 to 1999–2000	4	3	4	3
Fall full-time undergraduate enrollment[a]	42,000	15,000	10,000	2,000
Number of athletes[b]	932	374	363	238
Athletic department total expenditures	$73 million	$33 million	$8 million	$1 million
Athletically related student aid awarded	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Athletic program generated net revenue	Yes	Yes	No	No
Football is part of the program	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

[a]Undergraduate enrollment is for the fall 1998 semester and includes full-time, baccalaureate degree-seeking students.

[b]The number of athletes is an unduplicated count in that athletes were counted only once, regardless of the number of sports teams in which they participated.

Source: Equity in Athletic Disclosure Act Reports for school year 1998–99 (maintained by each school) and responses from the four schools to GAO's survey of collegiate athletic directors.

Though all four schools have unique characteristics, directors from each athletic program articulated factors that were key to facilitating successful program expansion without discontinuing teams. Table 10 lists these factors. All four schools cited the first three factors and two of the four schools cited the last factor. One of the athletic directors acknowledged, however, that a "one size fits all" approach may not be feasible and that these approaches may not apply to other schools.

Table 10: Factors Facilitating Athletic Program Expansion at the Schools Visited

Facilitating factor	Example
President of institution or governing board is supportive of expanding athletic program without discontinuing sports teams.	The Division III school president takes an interest in gender equity in athletics. When the school planned to add women's rowing, the president requested the addition of a men's rowing team as well.
Athletic director's philosophy emphasizes increasing participation opportunities for both men and women, and believing that what benefits one gender also benefits the other.	Adding women's teams at the Division I-AAA school resulted in increased support services, such as athletic trainers, that benefit men and women athletes alike.
Officials are able to identify new funding sources.	The smaller Division I-A school financed the addition of three new teams and upgrades to the other 19 teams in part by employing innovative strategies such as placing a portion of athletic department funds in investments that earned better rates of return.
Athletic program enjoys support of fans and community.	The single largest source of revenue at the larger Division I-A school is ticket sales from its football program. Football is considered an integral part of the university and the local community.

Athletic directors also identified several specific revenue-generating approaches for adding teams without discontinuing others.

Donations. The smaller Division I-A school revitalized a business relationship with the chief executive officer of a local private firm. This individual's prominence, in turn, encouraged financial support from the rest of the business community. Substantial donations from fans and locally based corporations also enabled the school to add new teams and build facilities such as a new football stadium, a sports complex with a softball field, a track, a soccer field, and a planned Olympic-sized pool. Similarly, at the larger Division I-A school, large donations helped the school to add teams and increase the capacity of its football stadium, build a new basketball and ice hockey arena, and upgrade locker facilities.

Rental fees. Another revenue-generating strategy was to rent out athletic facilities for other purposes and use the fees to expand the athletic program. For example, the football stadiums or basketball arenas at the Division I-A schools were used to host cultural and entertainment events such as concerts, or to serve as venues for prominent athletic events such

as a World Cup soccer match. In addition, the smaller Division I-A school took advantage of its proximity to a prominent venue by letting the public use the football stadium parking lot to accommodate overflow event parking; the annual proceeds of $200,000 were all allocated to the women's program. At the Division III school, local high school teams rented the football field for practice and special athletic events.

In addition to focusing on raising revenue, one athletic director told us that it was important to maintain flexibility in the use of funds available to the athletic department. For example, the larger Division I-A school's athletic department requires that any earnings in excess of a specified rate of return on endowment funds designated for specific teams be available for general intercollegiate athletic department uses. This gives the athletic director greater flexibility in allocating resources.

All four schools we visited also took various steps to reduce current or avoid incurring additional expenditures. These included the following strategies:

- Recruiting most prospective student-athletes via telephone rather than in person,
- Denying requests for some teams to be elevated from club to varsity status,
- Replacing a retiring full-time faculty member with a coach who also assumed other administrative duties,
- Limiting the size of the football team roster,
- Trimming administrative costs,
- Not awarding the maximum number of scholarships allowed, and
- Limiting team travel outside the region to one trip every 2 to 3 years to minimize travel expenses.

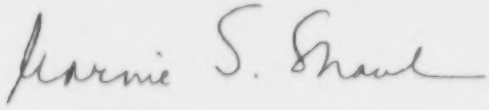
Another cost-containment strategy involved establishing partnerships between the school and the local community. Such partnerships reflected the schools' ability to capitalize on the unique characteristics of their geographic location. For example, the larger Division I-A school planned to undertake a cost-sharing project with the city and local school district to build a boathouse on a local river that would accommodate rowing teams from the university, high school, and general public. The smaller Division I-A school teamed with a local hospital offering a nationally recognized sports medicine program. Through the arrangement, the hospital provides free services, including a portable medical facility at sports events and physical screenings for each athlete. The Division III school formed a

partnership with a locally based professional men's basketball team. Under the agreement, the team was able to practice at the school's basketball courts in exchange for funding a new hardwood floor for the courts and renovations to the men's and women's locker rooms.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the Department of Education for comment, and it did not provide comments.

We are sending copies of this report to the Honorable Roderick R. Paige, Secretary of Education; appropriate congressional committees; representatives of NCAA and NAIA; and other interested parties. Please call me at (202) 512-7215 if you or your staff have any questions about this report. Key contacts and staff acknowledgments for this report are listed in appendix II.



Marnie S. Shaul
Director, Education, Workforce,
and Income Security

Scope and Methodology

As agreed with your offices, we focused our review of intercollegiate athletics on addressing the following questions:

- How did the number of men's and women's intercollegiate sports participants and teams at 4-year colleges and universities change in the 2 decades since the1981–82 school year?
- How many colleges and universities added and discontinued teams since the 1992–93 school year, and what influenced their most recent decisions to add and discontinue teams?
- How did colleges and universities make and implement decisions to discontinue intercollegiate sports?
- When colleges and universities added teams, what types of strategies did they use to avoid discontinuing sports teams or severely reducing their funding?

To determine the number of men's and women's intercollegiate sports participants and teams, we gathered participation statistics from the two largest 4-year intercollegiate athletic associations—the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Some schools were members of both associations. For example, of the 787 NCAA members and 515 NAIA members in 1981–82, 117 were dual-membership schools. By 1998–99, NCAA had 1,041 members and NAIA had 339 members, 61 of which were dual members as of April 1999, according to the NCAA. Based on the number of teams and average team sizes, we estimated that these schools accounted for about 3 percent of male and 2 percent of female participants in 1997–98. Because dual-membership schools report their participation statistics to both associations, we counted their statistics only once to avoid double-counting the numbers of teams and participants. The adjusted participation statistics were used to calculate net change in number of teams, number of participants, and participation rates between 1981–82 and 1998–99. To estimate rates of participation, we divided the total estimated number of participants for both associations by the estimated total number of full-time undergraduates enrolled at all 4-year institutions. To the extent that an individual student participated in more than one sport, our calculation of the number of participants may be overstated because these individuals are counted more than once in the statistics. In addition, some 4-year institutions are not members of either NAIA or NCAA, and they were excluded from our analyses. Although we did not verify the accuracy of the statistics provided by the NCAA and NAIA, they are the best available data and are widely used by researchers to study intercollegiate athletic participation.

To respond to the other three questions, we developed and administered a questionnaire to gather information from athletic directors at all 4-year colleges and universities that were members of either the NAIA or NCAA. We pretested a draft questionnaire at six schools and subsequently revised it based on their comments. In May 2000, we mailed the final questionnaire to 1,310 institutions including 326 NAIA members and 1,040 NCAA members (both active and provisional members.) This included 56 4-year colleges and universities that were members of both NCAA and NAIA. By October 2000, we had received 1,191 usable questionnaire responses for an overall response rate of 91 percent. In some cases, however, respondents did not respond to all applicable questions.

The questionnaire asked athletic directors for the total number of women's and men's intercollegiate sports teams added and discontinued during the 1992–93 to 1999–2000 school-year period. When calculating the number of new teams added, we excluded teams that had not yet begun participating in intercollegiate competition by the end of the 1999–2000 school year. Similarly, when calculating the number of teams discontinued, we excluded teams whose last day of intercollegiate competition was after the end of the 1999–2000 school year. We asked each school that added or discontinued a team to respond to additional questions concerning only the most recently added and most recently discontinued men's and women's sports teams. We reviewed athletic directors' questionnaire responses for consistency and in many cases contacted them or their staff to resolve inconsistencies, but we did not otherwise verify the information provided in the questionnaire responses.

To identify types of strategies that colleges and universities used to avoid discontinuing sports teams or severely reducing their funding, we used the questionnaire to collect information on how schools paid for new teams. We analyzed these responses for schools that had added some teams without discontinuing others. To get some specific examples of how schools augmented their athletic program without eliminating teams or severely reducing their funding, we visited four selected colleges and universities that were NCAA member schools. We chose these schools in order to achieve variation in a number of characteristics, including geographic diversity, whether the school was public or private, size of the athletic department budget, whether the school awarded athletic scholarships, whether sports were profitable, and whether the school sponsored football. At each school, we interviewed the athletic director

and other staff involved in administering the athletic program and toured the athletic facilities.

Appendix II

GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contacts

David D. Bellis, (415) 904-2272
Benjamin P. Pfeiffer, (206) 287-4832

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the individuals named above, Joel I. Grossman, Elsie M. Picyk, Meeta Sharma, Sharon M. Silas, Stanley G. Stenersen, Jason M. Suzaka, and James P. Wright made key contributions to this report.

Related GAO Products

Gender Equity: Men's and Women's Participation in Higher Education (GAO-01-128, Dec. 15, 2000).

Interscholastic Athletics: School District Provide Some Assistance to Uninsured Student Athletes (GAO/HEHS-00-148, Sep. 12, 2000).

Intercollegiate Athletics: Comparison of Selected Characteristics of Men's and Women's Programs (GAO/HEHS-99-3R, June 18, 1999).

Intercollegiate Athletics: Status of Efforts to Promote Gender Equity (GAO/HEHS-97-10, Oct. 25, 1996).

Intercollegiate Athletics: Compensation Varies for Selected Personnel in Athletic Departments (GAO/HRD-92-121, Aug. 19, 1992).

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